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ABSTRACT

Problems in the development of educational programs in isolated rural areas are caused primarily by lack of proper resources, enough students to efficiently conduct a quality educational program, and skill and expertise by those persons involved in the development of such a program. Major trends in education for American Indians and for people in the developing nations include a decrease in the numbers and percentage of illiterates, increased centralization of educational districts, and an increase in students' aspirations. Development, curriculum, inservice training, media, and educational policy are the major areas to be considered in the development of an educational program. Specific recommendations are that each country develop an educational policy for isolated areas, that local people have a voice in the educational programs within their communities, that a curriculum relevant to the needs of rural education be developed, that adequate pre-service and in-service programs for rural teachers be conducted, and that more use be made of media. (PS)

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EDUCATION IN ISOLATED RURAL AREAS

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EDUCATION IN ISOLATED RURAL AREAS

By

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and
Howard K. Conley

As one examines the development of educational programs in isolated rural areas of the world, certain problems become quite evident. These problems are caused primarily by 1) lack of proper resources, 2) lack of enough students to efficiently conduct a quality educational program, and 3) lack of skill and expertise by those persons involved in the development of a quality program. While the same is true in all areas of the world, it is especially true in those developing countries which have not had the resources essential for complete development of educational programs in the past.

Coverdale (1) pointed out that education is highly relevant to pioneering change in the world. He further stated that one of the most urgent problems facing developing countries is the serious shortage of educated and trained personnel at all levels of proficiency, noting an especially acute deficiency in regard to personnel suitably trained for agriculture development in rural education. If the area of agriculture becomes antiquated and neglected, it makes it much more difficult for other areas to become progressive and to develop in such a manner as to meet the needs of our ever changing and demanding societies.

Indications are that technical progress in agriculture is directly related to development of adequate rural educational programs. Such indications would seem to indicate that bringing knowledge of newer and better methods of

agriculture to peasant farmers is probably the most productive investment that can be made in those areas with a low agriculture economy.

As one examines Coverdale's thesis, it soon becomes apparent that one of the major disparities found in the world is that between education in the urban and in the rural areas. In the latter, inequality of educational opportunity is of most gravity and in most countries is the most wide spread. It is in the rural areas that schooling usually reaches the fewest children, shows the greatest inadequacies, and yields the lowest results.

The UNESCO Report (2) in 1970 pointed out that in most African and Latin American countries, over half of the primary children never return to school after the second year. It further stated that this phenomenon is especially true in rural areas. In addition, those who do manage to complete the primary years of schooling tend to receive inadequate and badly oriented education in relation to the demands of the rural environment, especially from the economic point of view. This report also reinforces the concept that a serious deficiency exists in those developing countries between the educational opportunities available to the urban child and the rural child. However, one of the reasons that much of the research indicates such findings is that such children are classified as dropouts and the fact is that in many instances, only two years of primary schooling is available to them, regardless of their level of aspiration.

MacLean (3) reported some startling facts concerning the Indians in the United States. These Indians would be classified primarily as a rural populace. Some of her findings are as follows:

1. The unemployment rate amoung Indians is nearly 40% as compared to the national average of 5.0%.

2. Of those Indians who are employed, one third are under-employed in temporary seasonal work.

3. Their average age at death is 44 as compared to the national average of 65 years.

4. The infant mortality rate is 34.5 per thousand, twelve points above the national average.

5. Ten percent of all the Indians have no schooling and sixty percent have less than an eighth grade education.

MacLean (3) pointed out that the studies conducted by Owens and Bass in the Southwest and Sellinger in the Northwest covered the major concentration of Indians in the United States. These studies, covering the period 1962-1968, reported that overall 57.2% of Indian students graduated from high school with 42.3% dropping out. However, on the brighter side, in the same period the overall Indian dropout rate declined more than 18%. Thus, from this it can be seen that the situation is showing improvement.

Eteffa (4), in his report on education in Ethiopia, stated that out of approximately 60,000 children who enrolled in grade one of the public schools in 1958, only 1,000 (less than 2%) were admitted to Halei Selassie I University in 1970. He indicated that it was a tremendous waste of economic and educational resources to concentrate only on the 2% who enrolled in college which the majority of the educational programs in Ethiopia did. He did clarify, however, that the entire 98% should not be classified as dropouts since some enrolled in specialized schools such as technical, commercial, agriculture, and nursing which in the long run would probably be more beneficial to the development of the country as a whole.

Renner (5), in his study of the educational system in Colombia found the situation there also to be less satisfactory in the rural areas than it was in the urban areas. He reported that schools in the rural areas offered a total of 188 days of classroom instruction each year, but since the boys and girls

alternated each day in attendance, each pupil received only half of the 188 days for educational purposes resulting in a school year of 94 days for a child. He also pointed out that a number of elementary schools found in Colombia were staffed with many teachers having no more than ten years of formal education. He also pointed out that in rural areas in particular, experienced and well qualified teachers may, because of disagreement with views of the local political power structure, be replaced by a teacher with more limited qualifications but with a more compatible political philosophy. In such cases, the experienced teacher is transferred to another rural area or suspended from duty. This type of insecurity often influences teachers to teach what the local polititicans wish rather than what they know to be true in light of their own academic backgrounds.

In his address at the National Conference on Arid Lands at Tucson Arizona in 1969, Walker (6) pointed out that well qualified teachers were often reluctant to accept employment in isolated rural areas where professional contact, to say the least, is quite limited and living conditions are often very primitive. He also stated that in many countries, the avenues to promotion lead directly to a central administrative structure and, generally speaking, to those who are known by their superiors and not necessarily because they have demonstrated outstanding ability. Therefore, strictly from the point of visibility, many teachers refuse to accept appointments in isolated areas. Those who do accept employment do so with their primary concern being getting a transfer which will enable them to get into a more urban environment.

Also, there seems to be a lack of understanding by a great many educators of the differences that exist in ethnic and cultural patterns of many groups of people living in rural areas. This is particularly true in a great many areas of the Americas where the Indian sub-culture is found to be extremely difficult to

become aculturated and a definite part of the regular school program. One also sees changes taking place in the attitudes of these people who do not want to become integrated into the mainstream of the dominant social structure and prefer to keep and highly value their own culture.

Local people, especially parents, need to become involved with the schools. Biglin (7) pointed out that a large percentage of the rural parents did not know their child's teacher. It is interesting to note that nearly 90% of the parents expressed a desire to know their child's teacher better and that 86% said that they would like to have their child's teacher visit in the home.

In her review of Indian Education in North America, MacLean (3) covered some of the major problems that educators have in working with Indians. It appeared that the educators' failed to recognize the Indians as belonging to a unique culture distinct from the mainstream of the French and Anglo cultures dominant in Canada. She reported that the educators tried to mold Indian students into a type of educational program that was completely alien to them. My own observation has shown this to be true in a great many areas of the United States, and I have no reason to believe that it is not true throughout most of the rest of North and South America. It is interesting to note, however, that some changes are taking palce.

In March, 1972, at a conference of Ministers of Education (8) it was reported that Latin America was the only region where literacy had declined between 1960 and 1970. This decline was not only in terms of percentage but also in absolute terms. The figures show that in 1960, there were forty-one million illiterates in Latin America. By 1970 this figure had dropped to 39 million. However, even though the figures indicate an improvement, the figures still present an alarming statistic.

The overall growth of education in Latin America shows serious unbalances in the actual opportunities available to the different groups of the population who are enrolling in schools and continuing to attend them. Geographic, ethnic, economic, and social factors aggravated by shortcomings in the educational system are the cause of these inequalities, and no systematic and deliberate action has yet been undertaken to overcome them. These areas of difficulties prove to be true not only in elementary and secondary schools, but also in higher education. As it was pointed out earlier in the Ethiopian study, only 2% of those students entering first grade ever enter a university. This type of problem is not unique to developing countries. In the report on the Education of the American Indians (9), it was stated that a great many rural students have difficulties in college. An extreme example of this is the study of the one hundred Indian students at the University of New Mexico during 1954 to 1958 where 70% were dropped because of low grades. Of the remaining 30%, the majority were placed on academic probation at some point in the course of their attendance.

President Rafael Hildaro of Venzuela (8) stated that the current situation in the Latin American countries calls for a fundamental reform of their respective educational systems. It was his thinking that each country had the obligation to provide the widest possible educational opportunities for all people in general. In his thinking, man is the essential link between education and development of a country. In too many cases, education has been separated from other developmental programs within the community. Stutz (10) further pointed out that what local people need is expertise in political action within the state, county or region and expertise in working within a bureaucracy in order that the bureaucracy will serve the people rather than use them. It was his thesis that in the present form, the rural school has not been an effective

agent of change despite the overwhelming influence, either positive or negative, education exerts on young people. The institution, itself, has had increasingly less success in accomplishing what society expects of it. He further reported that opposition to change is especially manifest in rural communities which have the tendency to rely heavily upon tradition. Sociological and educational research have both found the home and the family group has nominal influence on young people and tradition has taken precedence over change of any kind.

The lack of success in implementing lasting change in rural education in the past has been primarily due to the failure of change strategies to adequately increase the capacities of the rural people and the community (of which the school is a part) to cope with the new situation. This finding correlates with Stutz's thesis that without sufficient involvement of local leaders and customs, effective and lasting change in education is impossible.

The boarding school program which the Bureau of Indian Affairs operates within the United States is an excellent example of a program that failed to take into account tradition and rural resistance to change. Today, there is extreme criticism of this program by not only the Indians, but by politicians and others involved in the program who contend that it has not met the goals and objectives for which it was established. In the report on the education of the American Indian previously cited (9), it was stated that the dropout rate amoung Indian students at such boarding schools ran as high as 80%, with the largest percentage coming after a student completed the eighth grade.

To combat such situations, in those countries which have highly centralized administrative systems, attempts are being made at decentralization and a tendency is noted toward involvement of the complete community in educational reform. Eteffa (4), concerning education in Ethiopia, stated, "In order to make education effective in rural areas by changing the peasants' attitudes, which have their

roots in the pre-scientific culture, scientific and technical education have to be given the rural settings." Such would be true in any of the developing nations, or for that matter even the more scientifically developed countries which still have a large rural population. Eteffa further pointed out that too often the people feel that change should come from above, but actually if change is to be accepted, it must come from the people themselves. In order for this to be achieved, people with the necessary skills and training must be motivated to live and work in the villages and rural areas. Such a task is going to be difficult because even those students who live in the country seem to aspire of getting an education in order to move to the cities and obtain positions with the government or other more urban oriented professions. In meeting this problem, Walker (6) reported that simply more teachers, more buildings, more courses, and more facilities will not change the conditions now existing in rural education. It is his belief that the men and women who are responsible for the educational program are the critical components and of utmost importance is their attitudes toward self-examination and criticism of their product. He feels that a new performance base must be established. This change is needed since much of the training of people has been much too sophisticated and has not trained the people to adequately meet the challenges of the rural area. Therefore, programs must be developed that afford a base that does meet the criteria.

Trends

As was pointed out earlier in this report, changes for the better are taking place. It was mentioned that among Indians, there has been an 18% decline in the number of school dropouts and that Latin America has shown an overall decrease in the numbers and percentage of illiterates. The UNESCO report in 1970 (2), pointed out that there was a trend toward ever increasing aid to education in developing countries. The report stated that between 1960 and 1965 there

had been a 13% increase in Asia, 16% increase in Africa and a 20% increase in Latin America of funds allocated directly to education. Figures compiled in 1965 indicate that developing countries were allotting from 15% to 20% of their overall governmental expenditures to education. There are indications that this is increasing more rapidly each year.

Another trend that should be reported is the movement in the United States during the last fifty years toward increased centralization and the resultant increased size of educational districts. Stutz (10) pointed out that there are fewer people in rural areas in proportion to the national population than at any other time in the history of the United States. Along with this, there has been a steady decline in the number of services locally in rural communities. The school districts have been consolidated; the family farms have been consolidated into larger incorperated units. People think consolidation and megalopis- largeness has become a more valued concept than smallness. However, the same report shows some signs that this trend is reversing itself and the migrations to the cities have slowed down. In certain instances, at least in the rural areas surrounding the metropolitan areas, the migration is from the cities to the rural areas.

Another trend is in the area of students' aspirations. Rural youth now have much higher hopes for the future and a great many of them aspire to professional type jobs. In the San Salvador study, Hornik (11) found that a high proportion of students aspired to higher level of education than that attained by their parents and looked forward to advanced education to meet the criteria of professional careers. The report found that the aspirations of the students tended to be higher than the aspirations their parents had for them. This has been found to be true in a great many studies conducted in the southeastern part of the United States with rural students, especially those from minority

groups. Unreal aspirations may cause conflict many times when job opportunities and abilities do not meet the aspiration of the individual. Such a situation can cause unrest within an area.

Development

While there is an emphasis in the world today in the area of rural development, in all too many cases, major weaknesses in formal educational structures of the rural areas are not included in the developmental programs. This has been especially evident in some of the programs in the rural areas of the United States.

Kuvlesky and Stutz (12) develop the thesis that there is a tendency to narrowly define rural development in various ways that prohibit the development of a clear conception of what is actually involved in bringing about lasting social change inducive of an improved state of existance on the part of rural people. They contend that society can be changed for the better and that this change can be facilitated through the application of understanding and by applying the processes of social science. They also bring out that there should be a close relationship between educational policy and rural development needs.

The United Nations Report, International Education Year (2), stated that education should have a more instrumental role in contributing to the rural transformation than has been the situation in the past.

In this hoped for rural transformation, the farmers, themselves, must acquire more expertise and technical proficiency if they are to be expected to adopt methods other than the traditional methods of cultivation. To a great extent, this readiness to accept new concepts is dependent upon the quality of education they have received. Many employment opportunities related to the world of agriculture will also need to be filled by people with good general education, on the job training, and a willingness to work in the rural areas.

Stutz (10), strongly recommended that development include local people as staff personnel as educational programs within the local community are changed. He pointed out that numerous efforts in the past fifty years suggest the futility of attempting to revitalize rural areas by simply bringing in outside resource personnel and by trying to implement programs designed and administered by personnel stationed outside the rural area in centralized locations. He suggested an alternative strategy that could yield a much greater revitalization to a rural area from a given quantity of resources. Such a strategy would be aimed at developing the capabilities of the rural people themselves to identify needed change, to initiate that change, and to utilize a broad range of resources that already exist within the community itself. His belief is that this self-help process will give the rural people a sense of ownership in the change, and above all, provide more efficient utilization of diverse resources targeted at what the people, themselves, feel to be the main priority.

Eteffa (4) pointed out basically the same concept. Education cannot be disassociated from total economic development and political maturity of the people. In addition, Parker in Africa (16) and Coverdale (1) in Australia also pointed out the need for having comprehensive rural development policies which included the programs of education and that workable and acceptable strategies for solving educational programs must be related to economic development. Supporting this thought were the findings brought out in the UNESCO report in 1970 (2) that stressed that no effective national development was possible where the rural factor of the economy was allowed to remain deficient. The same report also emphasized the fact that the long neglected relationship between education and rural development was rapidly becoming a subject of general concern, especially in developing areas, and that educators and economists were now grappling with the task of making the educational process an active

and integral part of the total effort directed towards social and economical development.

Curriculum

Walker (6), addressing a International Conference on Arid Lands in 1969, pointed out that one of the major problems of education in the arid zone was that of developing meaningful curricular content. He questioned the fact that most of the curriculum was based on traditional subjects (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and wondered if in some of the isolated rural areas if it would be better to stress such areas as nature study, hikes, and social sciences. It was his opinion that those students going on to more advanced education could study science and technology in the specialized schools where limited trained manpower could be concentrated. Wilson (16), at the same meeting, stated that in working with people who are nomadic, rural, and agrarian in character, the educational program which focused on intellectual development without concern for the daily practical application found little acceptance and relevance to most of the population.

Another problem with the curriculum of many rural schools, is that the majority of the text materials are written from the viewpoint and background of the urban child. Also, it is quite difficult for some rural students of a different ethnic culture to relate to materials designed around the dominant culture. This has been found to be true even more so in the various studies on Indian education. A very small percentage of textbooks used by Indian children relate in any way to the Indian cultures.

A point of overwhelming agreement was the area of vocational education. Strong agreement was found that vocational education should be an integral part of the rural school curriculum. Biglin's (7) studies found that Navajo parents voiced almost unanimous support of vocational programs and wanted their children to learn some vocational skill while in school. In line with

such thinking, a majority of parents felt that the primary purpose of the schools and education in general was to prepare the child to earn a living. The majority of these Indian parents also wanted their children to have an education beyond high school and nearly half of them expressed a preference for vocational schooling at that level. To meet these needs, both Coverdale (1) and Eteffa (4) recommended establishment of vocational and career centers for both youth and adults. Adding his support to this area, Walker (6) encouraged the underdeveloped countries to emphasize more vocational education and stated that the arid areas of the developed countries of the world must develop vocational technical training institutions and increase the attention given to 1) job skills necessary for modern agricultural methods, 2) principles of decision making, 3) management and supervisory techniques necessary for exploitation of economic resources, and 4) maximum use of modern communication media and local demonstrations and techniques to facilitate the level of practical education.

Liebenow (13) also pointed out that schools should offer a curriculum that emphasized agriculture. He stated that the school garden programs in the past have failed because the activity had little relevance to the examination system and was supervised by the European and African missionary teachers who knew little about local agriculture and were more concerned with the problems of status.

Biglin's (7) studies indicated that people were willing to participate in the educational programs but that they wanted a voice in the type of programs which were designed for them.

In-Service

A great many of the teachers in the rural areas have less academic training than those teachers in the urban schools. This would seem to indicate a need for in-service training for teachers in rural areas. In a conference for administrators of education in Latin America (8), it was pointed out that

perhaps the factor which has added most to the quality of education was that of pre-service and in-service training of the teaching staff.

Much effort and planning is needed in the area of in-service training. Walker (6) pointed out that one of the major problems in the arid countries was that of training teachers. He indicated that many teachers, especially at the elementary and secondary level, are poorly prepared and often have a limited education themselves. There was little or no training of teaching methods and little, if any, professional contact with other teachers on the part of the rural teacher. He further noted that only a few countries have initiated in-service programs, short-courses, and seminars for teacher improvement. He recommended the use of television, radio, and other means of communication that might serve to relieve these deficiences. Rideout (14) pointed out that one of the greatest problems in the rural areas was not only attracting qualified teachers in the first place, but providing them with the necessary methods and means to enable them to keep abreast of the expansion of educational concepts and advancements.

Media

Another program with promise of worthwhile gains in a minimum of time is that of more efficient use of media in the rural areas. Some areas of the world, especially Australia, have been using radio as a means of up-dating education for rural children for a number of years. An achievement of especial significance in this area is the educational satelite that is to be orbited in the near future over the Rocky Mountain States in North America. The primary purpose of this satelite is to provide educational TV programs for children in isolated rural areas of the Rocky Mountain states. The major emphasis of these programs will be directed toward career education.

Both Walker (6) and Reiner (5) point out that radio instruction promises to be a worthwhile means of supplementing the education of students in some of the more remote areas. The radio probably gives evidence of much more promise than television because in many countries, television reception is limited to the urban areas and the fact that the invention of transistors has brought the cost of radios down to a level where they are within reach of many of the poor people of the world. However, scientific achievements such as the satelite program can change this drastically in the future.

Hornik (11), in his study of television and education of farmers in San Salvador, reported that those farm classes which incorporated television with other methods of teaching showed much more academic gain in science and social studies, but reported no gain in mathematics at the seventh grade level. However, at the ninth grade level, it was found that all students after two years in the new program scored higher than students in the traditional program.

A common pitfall of the uses of new media seems to be in enthusiastically adopting a media, then deciding what its actual usefulness is. It would be much more feasible to determine the goals and objectives to be met, then choose the media that will best accomplish the task of meeting those goals and objectives. This relationship between the ends and means is not a simple one, however. The means can and do influence the ends both for good and for bad. One should keep in mind that a new communication medium may make it possible to establish attainable objectives that have previously thought to be beyond reach, or even more likely, not even envisioned.

Educational Policy

Kuvlesky (12) has argued, as a result of his research among low income people in the United States, that the only hope for relatively quick and broad improvement in life changes among rural people in this country is the establishment of a high priority of general educational policy and better serving the rural communities and rural people. He feels that no structural aspect of society has

more bearing on the nature and degree of rural development than its educational policy. Wilson (15) gave an excellent example of the influence that educational policy has upon school when he cited the Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora school systems. The two systems, although quite close to each other in terms of distance, ethnic background and language, reflected quite a diversity of commitment and political philosophy regarding educational programs and structure. He pointed out that the schools on the Mexican side of the border still reflected a strong French tradition of intellectual development rather than a pragmatic application of principles to solve local problems. He pointed out that the control was not in the hands of the local people or at the state capitol, but was in the hands of the minister of education in Mexico City. Across the border in Nogales, Arizona, the system tended to reflect the state of Arizona system, which is one of fifty systems in the United States, and reflected much more local control.

The majority of studies show that people want to run their own schools. Both Biglin (7) and MacLean (3) reported that the Indian people felt they should have the control of the local school and that policy making should be in their hands.

Walker (6) pointed out that in the area of education, many countries have left too many of the decisions in the hands of the producer. Education should have its hand on the heartbeat of the country, should strive to generate a two-way flow of information which on the one hand would help formulate a new policy of program directions and on the other hand help the public. The consumer is in a much better position to understand what should be expected in the end product.

Walker also emphasizes the need to create a system for constant review and evaluation of educational programs in order to assure that they continue to fit society and its needs.

The UNESCO report (2) indicated that educational training programs like other development efforts were increasingly being required to prove their worth. The criteria of the relationship between the effectiveness and cost that education must compete with other development sectors such as agriculture, public health, transportation for which increasingly good development rationales are presented. The educators must equip themselves with the analytic tools for keeping track of the cost of educational courses, programs and instructions along lines that permit valid comparisons of these costs with educational outcomes. In addition to preparing themselves to identifying costs, it is extremely important that the desired outcome should be identified in terms that can be measured. Unfortunately the articulation and objectives, applying the appropriate unit to educational value, the evaluation of outcome, and performance is seldom practiced in education. Stutz stated that a procedure to set stated objectives and proper evaluation tools for seeing that these objectives are met should be an integral part of educational policy.

Specific Recommendations

As recommendations are stated which cover such a broad geographical area of education among isolated areas in the world, it should be remembered that specific cases can probably be given in each instance where it may not work. The recommendations are in general; however, it is felt that they would be beneficial in bringing about proper educational change in a great many rural areas in our world. These are as follows:

1. Each country should develop an educational policy which would include more rapid development of education in isolated areas. Interest should be given to these areas at least on equal basis to that of education in urban areas of the country. If at all possible, it should be given a larger emphasis because it is presently so far behind the educational program found in the metropolitan centers.

2. A policy should be so stated that local people have a voice in the educational programs within their communities. This is especially true in isolated areas where the people are of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds than the majority of the people within the nation.

3. A broader based curriculum should be developed which would be more relevant to the needs of education in rural areas. Ways should be found which would broaden the vocational offerings in the schools. A special emphasis should be made on education for the development of agriculture. Efforts should be made to have a coordinated effort to insure that education would be a part of the development programs in rural areas. This division in the past has often led to one not knowing what the other is doing.

4. More adequate pre-service and in-service programs for teachers in the rural areas should be conducted. Added emphasis in these areas should be given in order to attract better teachers to the rural areas.

5. More use should be made of media in developing educational programs in the rural parts for developing of our countries. Probably one of the easiest and most economical would be a more adequate use of radio and television in those areas where it can be utilized.

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